

Translation – A Major Force Unifying Diverse Cultures and Countries

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ABSTRACT

Literature is defined as 'the mirror of society.' True literature is ageless, timeless and borderless. Translation is a means to trace the essential human spirit that underlies all literature. This paper focuses on the importance of translation in the Indian as well as the world context. Though, it is commonly held that the cultures of the Occident and the Orient are diametrically opposite, one realizes that they are not so, when one enters these worlds, via translation. In a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-script country like India, translation plays the role of a unifier in helping to trace the Indianness that lies beneath each of the regional literatures. People of different countries and diverse faiths realize the sense of oneness when they read literature of other faiths. Translation of a literary text enriches both, the Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL).

KEYWORDS

Translation; Occidental; Oriental; Multi-cultural; Multi-lingual; Multi-scripted.

Literature is an integral part of any society and has a profound effect on the ways of thinking and behaving of people in that society. It is society, that is the subject matter and that gets reflected upon in any literature. It literally shapes a society and its beliefs. Though different authors have defined literature differently, all of them agree that literature is the mirror of society. Writers use literature as a platform, to point out the ills of society with an intention to improve on them. They also use it to highlight the appreciable aspects towards promoting goodwill in the society.

Culture and traditions of any geographic region, have their own special significance with respect to the way they shape the ethos and become the defining factors for the people living within the geographic boundary while also

differentiating the region from the other. The uniqueness of any region can be understood with the help of translated texts from that region.

Language is so much more than just a tool enabling us to communicate. It is the expression of culture, society, and beliefs. Thousands of cultures exist around the world, all expressing the specific aspects of their daily lives through their own languages. Translation is more than just putting across the words of one language to another. It builds bridges between cultures and allows one to experience the cultural phenomena that would otherwise be too esoteric and remote to grasp through one's own cultural lens.

The very existence of world literature stands as a testimony to the relevance of translation. In the field of

literature, the contribution of translation has been immense. Classics and masterpieces can be enjoyed by people across the world. But for translation, most of the literary achievements of one country would have no hearing in other soils. But for translation, we could not have access to several great works of literature. The whole world agrees that Tolstoy was a master storyteller and Rabindranath Tagore is universally accepted as a fine poet. But how many of us have read Tolstoy in Russian or Rabindranath in Bangla?

The Oxford English dictionary defines translation as “a process of changing something that is spoken or written into another language.” Translation is, thus one of the means to trace the essential human spirit that underlies all literature. Particularly, in the Indian context translation has played a very crucial bridging role. In the land of linguistic and cultural diversity, translation plays the role of a unifier in helping to trace the Indianness that lies beneath each regional literature. To trace this sense of commonness, translation alone can be of help, as mastering all these languages and reading their literature in the original, within one’s lifetime is a task well beyond human capacity.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan stated many years ago that “Indian literature is one, though written in different languages”. India is said to be not a country but a sub-continent with a bewildering diversity of cultures, customs and languages. The translation assumes enormous importance in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-scriptal country like India. There are several languages in India belonging to different language families. The major ones are the Indo-Aryan languages (Hindustani, Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bhojpuri, Odia, Maithili, Sindhi etc.) spoken by 75% of Indians, the Dravidian languages (Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada) spoken by 20%

and other languages by the rest of Indians. The ‘Official Language’ of India is Hindi in Devanagari script and English. Other 22 languages are referred to as Scheduled Languages (Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu as per the Eighth Schedule). In 2011, the People’s Linguistic Survey of India, headed by the eminent academic, Ganesh N. Devy, found that there are 780 languages and 66 different scripts in India. Not only that some languages are written in more than one script. For example, Punjabi is written in Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi script, Kashmiri is written in Devanagari and Sharada script, Hindi in Devanagari and Arabic script, Konkani is written in Devanagari, Roman, Malayalam, Kannada and Perso-Arabic script. So in India, the translation of literature from one regional language into another assumes supreme importance as a means of achieving national integration and developing national consciousness.

Translation, especially English translation liberates a text from its regional limitations and gives it a new life, better recognition, a wider reach and an international status. The moment a text is translated from a regional language into English, it begins to enjoy better prospects of recognition and rewards. At once, it becomes accessible to a wider public and belongs to the international community of texts, though it may be understood and analyzed from a cross-cultural or multicultural perspective.

We find that there are different ways in which the translation of a text can be carried out. One is by substituting the difficult words of one language into simple words of the same language. Second, translating from one regional language into another. And third, translating from one regional language into a foreign language.

In relation to Sanskrit literature, we find that the first type of translation i.e. a monolingual translation was used in the ancient period. Almost all the works in Sanskrit have a commentary in Sanskrit given below the original text. 'Mallinath' was a commentator, who has commented on all texts of Kalidas. No text of Kalidas is complete without Mallinath's commentary. So much so that in Marathi we have an idiom 'Mallinathi Karne' which means to make special comments.

Even in the early days, translations were being done in India. Often in such cases, the SLT (Source Language Texts) were the Sanskrit classics and the TL, the regional languages. These early translations from Sanskrit to regional languages were not word-for-word translations. To the translators of those days, both languages were 'their own' and their intention to translate Sanskrit texts was 'to liberate the scriptures from, the monopoly of a restricted section and class of people'.

In this manner, in India, we were engaged in literary translation for a considerably long time. At least for the last one thousand years, our poets, playwrights and storytellers have quite freely drawn from other Indian sources to compose poems, plays and stories in their own languages. Quite often the source language has been Sanskrit and the most frequently targeted texts were the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The results were Pampa-Bharata in Kannada, Kamba-Ramayan in Tamil, Vilanka Ramayana in Oriya and many others.

These were not, translations as we understand the term today. Yet, the original remained in the new text for listeners-later readers to be able to relate to it, if they wished to read the old texts. Interestingly, we don't have a word in any Indian language that would be equivalent to the term translation. We borrowed 'anuwad' from Sanskrit (where it means 'speaking after', ours being an oral

tradition) and 'tarjuma' from Arabic, 'rupantar' from Bangla, 'Vivartanam' in Malayalam or 'bhashantar' in Hindi. On the other hand, when we appreciated a literary text in one language, we used it as a take-off point and composed a similar text in another language. So, the term 'transcreation' may well be most appropriate for such a situation. The word 'transcreation' is explained in the Oxford English Dictionary as an uncountable noun, standing for "creative translation seen as producing a new version of the original work." Thus, Sant Jnaneshwar's *Jnaneshwari* is not the translation of the *Gita*, it's an original work; Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* is not a translation of *Ramayana* but an original creation.

During the Mughal period, Persian became the ruler's language. To satisfy their curiosity the rulers occasionally got Indian texts translated into Persian. During the reign of Akbar, Badauni laboured for four years to translate the Ramayana into Persian, while Dara Shukoh got the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagwad Gita* and *Yogavashistha Ramayana* rendered into Persian by a team of translators. However, with the advent of the British, there was a notable change in the trend. In the earlier days, the TL was often a regional language. After the coming of the British the TL was mainly English.

To understand the diverse people of the colonized land, the culture and language of the vast expanse, a unified medium was required and the 'masters' chose English. Through this language the cultural exchange took place. To have a better inter-cultural relationship, translation became very important, during the colonial period. Many Indian texts, were translated into English by the British themselves. Some of the best translations in English are *Shakuntala* by Sir William Jones, *Bhagwad Gita* by Barbara Stoler Miller, *Gita-Govinda* by Lee Seigel and

ManuSmriti by Wendy Doniger to name just a few.

With regards to translation, an ideal translation should be accurate as to meaning and natural as to the receptor language forms used. An intended audience who is unfamiliar with the source text should be able to readily understand it. The success of a translation is measured by how closely it measures up to these ideals. The ideal translation should be accurate, i.e. reproducing as exactly as possible the meaning of the source text. Secondly, natural i.e. using natural forms of the receptor language in a way that is appropriate to the kind of text being translated. It should be communicative in terms of meaning, expressing all aspects of the meaning in a way that is readily understandable to the intended audience.

True literature is read across national borders, across time periods, across languages, across literature and other arts. It is 'literature without borders'. Translation helps us to reach the civilization behind a given literature.

With globalization, English has acquired the status of the common lingua franca for the global community. A lingua franca is a language systematically used to make communication possible between people, who do not share a mother tongue. Today, the most popular second language is English. Some 3.5 billion people have an acquaintance with the language. English is the dominant language on the Internet. About 35% of the world's mail, telexes, and cables are in English; approximately 40% of the world's radio programs are in English. Writing in English and getting published by British publishers gave the writer a distinct advantage over those who were writing only in the regional languages or getting published locally.

Literary Translation promotes shared values. The whole exercise of translating a literary text involves not only examining closely the text being

undertaken for the exercise but also being receptive to the ideas and the cultural context in which the text was composed. A large amount of literature has been written on human rights issues, environmental phenomena, and elements of common humanity. Translation of these texts helps to sensitise the readers to the shared values of people living in different communities. It is important to have access to the stories and experiences beyond the borders of one's own country. This explains why the translation of the literary text assumes so much importance.

The translation of literary work enriches the TL. This helps to bring new terms and ideas with it. The target language is promoted as each translation of a text is the renewal of language and imagery. The English language has achieved the status of a global language. The main feature of English is its 'adaptability'. The language has taken on words from many other languages and cultures, giving it its great diversity. Every day many new words are added to English. That is why it is said jokingly that English is an 'additional language'. For example, café, entrepreneur, genre, renaissance etc. are French words added to English; philosophy, physical, photo etc. are Greek; acumen, agenda, altruism etc. are Latin and juggernaut, bungalow, verandah, jungle etc. are Hindi words added to English.

Translation makes us experience different cultures and norms through literature. By reading the translation of a literary text, we get a worldview from the perspective of other languages. After all, languages are the precursors for different cultures. Through translation, a literary text can travel across nations and boundaries. Many a time, it renews the literary impact of ancient literature, giving it meaning and regeneration. Translation allows us to read the best literature from across the globe.

Translation is more than just a conversion of one language to another. It is a conversation between two languages for fulfilling a common goal. With a literary work, translation can generate a deeper understanding of the complexities of language. It improves written and spoken communication skills, leading to valuable teaching experience. Translation enhances language learning and exploration. This leads to young people gaining confidence as well as critical thinking. As translation opens doors for experimenting with new languages, it ultimately results in readers getting more engaged in language learning.

One interesting aspect of literary translation is that it encourages audiences across the globe to read about new subject matters. The literary festivals that take place internationally attract new readers, fostering the habit of reading. Translation is promoted at these festivals, as they

cater to different linguistic groups. By providing access to literary works from different lands and their cultures, the translations give a chance to the readers to experiment with different languages. Hence, literary translation presents opportunities to the masses to explore other languages as well as compels them to read more.

On the whole, literary translations help people across the globe to learn more about unexplored regions and the people residing there. Hence, the translation of literary texts can lead to global understanding and harmony. To conclude, I would like to state that translation of literary texts is of immense value and should be encouraged and promoted. 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam', 'the Universe as a family'. This is what our ancestors wished for, 5000 years ago. Translation of literary texts can help us to make this dream come true.

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